Claims:

1. A method of hardening ATM cells, the ATM cells each including a header and payload, the method including the steps of encoding the header and payload within an individual transmission frame.

2. A method of hardening ATM cells as claimed in claim 1 wherein the header and payload are interleaved within an individual transmission frame.

3. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein error correction is applied separately to the header and the payload prior to interleaving them within a transmission frame.

4. A method as claimed in claim 3 wherein the error correction corresponds to Reed Solomon forward error correction.

5. A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein the Reed Solomon encoding is applied to the header and payload separately following which the encoded header is interleaved with the encoded payload.

6. A method as claimed in claim 1 where empty/idle ATM cells are eliminated/used to substantially match input and output rates of an ATM link.

7. A method of hardening ATM cells substantially as herein described with reference to figures 2 to 5.

8. An apparatus adapted for hardening ATM cells in accordance with the method of any of claims 1 to 7.

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9.   An apparatus adapted for hardening ATM cells substantially as herein
described and with reference to figures 2 to 5.